

## **ON THE NEED FOR A STATE DEFENSE FORCE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER COUNCIL**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The State Defense Force (SDF) organization is based on the cadre concept, where the staff is composed of senior officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and specialists in those areas within its mission portfolio. While the officers are involved in command, mission design and operation, within the guidelines established by the Adjutant General (TAG), and training requirements, the NCOs form the basis for conducting the training required to execute the mission. This establishes the need for consistent training standards for basic skills across the SDF elements, the companies, battalions, regiments, and specialty corps. The NCO Council proposed herein provides those standards based on Headquarters Operations and Training guidelines for the element NCOs to use in training and mission preparation. NCO leadership is the key to the entire process.

### **LEADERSHIP**

When you talk about the NCO you must first address leadership, because NCOs and leadership go hand in hand. Leaders whether officers or NCOs must have a solid foundation, they must know their core values, strengths, and weaknesses, and they must have direction. Charles Shultz's comic strip character Charlie Brown from Peanuts once said that "Sometimes I lie awake at night and ask myself, why am I here? Then a little voice answers, why? Where do you want to be?" Good leaders must always reassess to determine if they are staying in their lane of responsibility and asking where they need to be.

The U.S. Army Leadership Manual (Field Manual 6-22, 1999) states: "At any level, anyone responsible for supervising people or accomplishing a mission that involves others, motivating them to action or influencing their thinking or decision making, is a leader." FM 6-22 does not make any distinction between the officer and the NCO, a leader is a leader no matter what the rank. Our military is a value based organization and that is what has made it great. For the Sailor or Marine it is "Honor, Courage, and Commitment" (Sailor's Creed, n.d.) and for the Airman it is "Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do." (AFD-070906-003, 1997). For the Soldier there is the acronym "LDRSHIP," which stands for "Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal courage." (TRADOC Pam 600-4). This combined with the four "C"s of "Courage, Candor, Competence, and Commitment" (Reimer, 1996) make up a value base system that has stood the test of time and should be embraced on an organizational and personal level.

For a military organization to be successful it needs values, a solid vision, a meaningful mission, guiding principles, and plans to succeed. Leaders must continually ask themselves "Where do you want to be?" and how do you go about getting there. Leadership is influencing people by providing purpose, direction, vision, motivation, and support to accomplish a mission and improve the organization. It is done on many levels and in many forms. In the Active Duty, Reserve Forces and the Title 32 (32 U.S.C., § 109) authorized State military (established as the State Defense Force, State Guard, State

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Military Reserve, State Guard Reserve depending on each state's legislature) leadership requirements remain the same.

## **THE ROLE OF THE NCO**

In order to be an effective SDF member of a team he or she (referred to herein collectively as he or him or his) must know the role and the rules for that team as detailed in FM 7-21.13 (Field Manual 7-21.13, 2003). NCOs are the backbone of the military and are responsible for training, leading, and taking care of enlisted SDF members (often referred to as EMs). They are responsible for ensuring that their troops are prepared to function as an effective unit.

Successful completion of a mission depends on accurately passing information between leaders and subordinates, up and down the chain of command and the NCO support channel (Field Manual 7-21.13, 2003).

### **Chain of Command**

FM 7-21.13 § 3-34 states:

“The Army has only one chain of command. Through this chain of command, leaders issue orders and instructions and convey policies. An effective chain of command is a two-way communication channel. Its members do more than transmit orders; they carry information from within the unit or organization back up to its leader. They furnish information about how things are developing, notify the leader of problems, and provide request for clarification and help. Leaders at all levels use the chain of command—their subordinate leaders—to keep their people informed and render assistance. They continually facilitate the process of gaining the necessary clarification and solving problems.”

Specifically this FM talks about the NCO Support channel and how important it is to the proper functioning of a military unit.

### **NCO Support Channel**

FM 7-21.13 § 3-36 states:

“The NCO support channel parallels and reinforces the chain of command. NCO leaders work with and support the commissioned and warrant officers of their chain of command. For the chain of command to work efficiently, the NCO support channel must operate effectively.”

*“The NCO support channel...is used for exchanging information; providing reports; issuing instructions, which are directive in nature; accomplishing routine but important activities in accordance with command policies and directives. Most often, it is used to execute established policies, procedures, and standards involving the performance, training, appearance, and conduct of enlisted personnel. Its power rests with the chain of command.”*

## **Coordination of the Chain of Command and the NCO Support Channel**

FM 7-21.13 § 3-40 states:

SDF members should use the chain of command or the NCO support channel (as appropriate) to help solve problems, whether small or large. The chain of command and the NCO support channel are also effective and efficient means of communication from where the rubber meets the road to the very highest echelons of the Army. Whether you have a problem, suggestion, complaint or commendation the chain and the channel are the means to communicate to the leaders who need to know.

So we can see that the NCO support channel parallels and supports the chain of command, it resolves issues, enforces rules and regulations, and makes the dissemination of information to the rank and file a much easier process.

## **THE ROLE OF THE SERGEANT MAJOR**

General George Washington appointed Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben as the second Inspector General of the Continental Army in 1778. Friedrich von Steuben took great steps to improve the tactics, regulations, and discipline of the Continental Army. Von Steuben's knowledge of Prussian Army regulations transformed Washington's Army, making them capable of meeting British regulars on the battlefield, and setting the foundation for today's NCO Corps. In von Steuben's Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States, Part I (von Steuben, 1779), often referred to as the "Blue Book", von Steuben defined the role of the sergeant major. By writing that he, "must pay the greatest attention to their [noncommissioned officers] conduct and behavior...." In his instructions, he noted that the sergeant major should be well acquainted with management, discipline of the regiment, and of keeping rosters and forming details. Early on the sergeant major was an assistant to the Adjutant, his role with the enlisted and noncommissioned officers have remained basically the same, he continues to be the cornerstone of the NCO Corps.

FM 7-21.13 § 3-37 states:

"The connection between the chain of command and the NCO support channel is the senior NCO. Commanders issue orders through the chain of command, but senior NCOs must know and understand the orders to issue effective implementing instructions through the NCO support channel. Although the first sergeant and command sergeant major are not part of the formal chain of command, leaders should consult them on all enlisted SDF member matters and individual training."

The Sergeant Major (SGM) is the senior NCO that is in charge of the NCO Corps for their unit.

According to Elder, et al. (1995).

"The title of sergeant major evokes many images: the steady, courageous leader whose very presence calms and settles his men on the eve of battle; the articulate, demanding senior NCO of the battalion who accepts only the highest standards of appearance, performance, and training; the experienced senior leader who always seems to have the answer or knows where to get it; and the ever-present embodiment of higher level

commanders whose ability to communicate directly with line troops is so often taken for granted.”

The SGM’s experience and ability are equaled by none, and his leadership influence is generally not limited to those directly under his charge. The SGM is a subject matter expert in his technical field, primary advisor on policy development, analytical reviewer of regulatory guidance. A SGM’s success depends on how well he operates in different worlds, one as the trusted advisor to his commander, one for his troops and the last for himself.

Sergeant Major Begg wrote about the three worlds of the SGM; to the Commander, to the troops/the NCO Corps, and to himself (Begg, 1996):

### **The world with the Commander**

“To the CO, the sergeant major is the one person close to him, other than his wife, who without fear of retribution by efficiency report runs counter to the commander’s known or suspected feelings. Like the boy in the fable, the sergeant major can say, ‘Look! The king has no clothes!’”

### **The world with the Troops/NCO Corps**

“The sergeant major is a port in a storm, a refuge in time of need. He embodies approachable, sympathetic wisdom. He is a grizzled old head who knows people and regulations. His advice and counsel can prevent a lot of grief.”

“The sergeant major is a representative of the men to the front office. He is there to look after their interests. He is an enlisted conscience among the brass, a union leader without strike powers. He is duty-bound to speak in behalf of the men. He does so at the risk of falling into disfavor himself.”

### **The world of the Sergeant Major**

“More than any other person, the sergeant major respects the fitness and necessity of the status quo. At the same time, he burns to see change and adjustment benefit the individual soldier. Deaf ears in both the officer corps and the enlisted ranks have thrust him into the role of interpreter. He belongs in two worlds. How well he does his job depends upon how well other people understand what it is.”

Clearly, leadership starts at the top, if the NCO Corps is the foundation by which all enlisted are mentored, trained, and disciplined, then the Sergeant Major is the corner stone of that foundation. A well defined Chain of Command and NCO Support Channel go hand in hand and functions to support the goals and mission of the unit. This is already done in the U.S. Armed forces and many SDF units across the country.

## **THE FUTURE OF THE STATE DEFENSE FORCE**

Over the years, just as the Active Army has looked down on the Army National Guard (NG), the NG looks down on the State Defense Force (SDF), often referring to it as an unprofessional coffee club of “good ole boys,” lacking in training and not having that warrior ethos - Esprit de Corps - that brings a military unit together. Now, with so many NG units imbedded in with the active Army, and with the transformation of the SDF into a more professional military support unit integrating with its NG, this mind set is changing and a new paradigm is taking its place.

Training is one key component to facilitate this transformation. A mixture of Boot Camp and college campus environments are found in SDF units across the country. They all have a common thread of Initial Entry Training Course (IET), Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC), and Advanced Non-Commissioned Officers Course (ANCOC). Among other courses, these are designed for the prior and non prior service SDF member, to instill a military esprit de corps and develop a professional military SDF.

A number of states are starting the transformation process from the old World-War-Two/Cold-War model of the SDF to a new, modern, State Military Department integrated approach. This inherent approach is toward more professional support elements designed to supplement their State Military Department in areas where that need exists. The Maryland Defense Force, for instance, provides this support through a Chaplain Corps, an Engineer Corps, a Medical Regiment, and others, and temporarily assigns them to elements of the National Guard (NG). Other examples are the Texas State Guard, which has established a Medical Brigade for that purpose, and the Georgia State Defense Force, which is beginning to offer Chaplain, legal, and engineering support to its NG.

### **How the NCO Functions to Enhance the SDF**

What is missing to support the integration of the SDF with its NG is a more unified, fully staffed NCO Corps. The SDF cannot fully integrate with a professional military organization without the guidance, support and leadership of a well built, well trained NCO Corps. NCOs must maintain fundamental soldiering at the forefront of everything we do. And that means we must focus on the basics, maintain military values, facilitate the transformation, and support the missions of our SDF unit.

When a civilian joins the Military he is assigned to a unit and a drill sergeant oversees his transformation into military life. When a civilian joins the SDF he is assigned to an element and, depending on the element, he will learn what he needs to know from other SDF members. Unfortunately, that is where it stops, many SDF units do not bring the volunteer soldier into a military mind set. This is an apparent failure of the present system and why some officers feel the need to develop an unofficial guide upon joining a SDF. The often observed uniform violations, inappropriate customs, and lack of military courtesies, all demonstrate the need for a professional military force within the SDF.

The question has been posed many times by Command and by element commanders, “What would we do with more NCOs?” The answer to that is to understand what the NCOs do in the active duty military.

Everyone in the military has an expectation of what a NCO ought to be. This is due to the fact that NCOs share their creed and proudly announce that no one is more professional than they are. They proclaim that they are the backbone of their military unit. Accomplishing the mission and taking care of SDF members is what the NCO Corps is all about, and they do it with Pride.

NCOs develop SDF members, they teach, train, council, and mentor the troops. NCOs instill the military bearing, traditions, and morale that keep and pass on the ethics and values of the Armed Forces. As such, given the support from all levels of leadership, they can do the same for their SDF unit.

NCOs don't need to worry about the color of the beret or type of Class A uniform they're all going to wear next year – they need to spend time conducting in-ranks inspections, Drill and Ceremony, and formations to teach SDF members how to properly wear the uniform they have. Likewise, setting and enforcing the standards.

NCOs need to spend time teaching the importance of counseling and communicating with their troops, including officers, NCOs and troops. Communicating means more than just talking to them, it is also listening to their concerns in both directions and doing something to solve those problems. In other words, NCOs need to train and mentor, setting and enforcing the standards.

Being a mentor is a huge part of what NCOs must do. Most SDF units are a combination of troops from all branches of the Military, including retired servicemen, and non-prior-service soldiers. The “wide-eyed deer in the headlights” look is common among new soldiers. The NCO needs to step up and set the standard for mentoring and teaching all members the basics of functioning in a military environment.

Many SDF units are in the midst of some of the most dramatic changes in their history. Never before has any SDF unit undergone such a profound transition. It is the duty of the NCO to ensure the welfare of soldiers as a priority. To do that, we must stick to the fundamentals of soldiering. Establishing a NCO Support Channel in all SDF units and beginning the process of bringing a solid professional military bearing to all SDF units.

The Army Study Guide reinforces the NCO Support Channel (Army Study Guide, 2006), yet makes it clear that it is subordinate to and supportive of the chain of command. The NCO support channel is not an independent channel; it is incumbent on the users of this channel to ensure the unit chain of command is kept informed of actions implemented through the NCO Support channel.

As not all SDF units have a well established NCO program or proper NCO support channel, a viable solution is to develop a “Noncommissioned Officer Council” to approximate the NCO support channel.

### **Proposed SDF NCO Council**

The Proposed SDF NCO Council is a dual purpose organization, the first mission is to bind together the NCOs within the different directorates of the SDF, the second is to be a vehicle for the chain of command to interact more closely with the development of the NCOs of the SDF. The NCO

Council will have a Command Sergeant Major (CSM) or Acting SGM (A/SGM) from each element and Directorate. The A/SGM will be the highest ranking NCO in that element or Directorate to ensure that the NCO chain of command is maintained. The Chief of Staff may appoint an Officer to provide oversight for the NCO Council.

The goals and mission of this version of the NCO Support Channel will be to develop an approved NCO training program; promote ethics, values, and leadership skills; enforce military customs, courtesies, bearing, and uniform wear and care; make recommendations to the Command Staff on NCO matters; and function as a board to resolve NCO issues. The intention is for all of this to be passed out and implemented SDF wide.

The NCO Council would have a charter to clearly define and approve its mission, goals, and structure, in conjunction with and fully supported by the Command Staff. Among its assignments, it would develop, jointly with the Operations and Training Directorate (G-3), a Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course (BNCOC) that would be a challenging curriculum, designed to develop and enhance the skills of tomorrow's SDF member.

A follow on assignment would be to develop jointly with the G-3 an Advanced Noncommissioned Officer course (ANCOC), whose mission would be to develop an NCO that is tactically and technically proficient in the skills necessary to lead, train, employ, and maintain military focus. This course would further focus on similarities between the Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) classifications and how they operate together in the Contemporary Operational Environment.

Future NCO Council activities could eventually include a First Sergeants Course and a SGM development program.

Additionally, as support for Command, the NCO Council could conduct a military style NCO Promotion Board, where soldiers actually sit in front of a panel of their peers to be assessed for promotion. The result would provide the soldier's Commander with valuable input for the promotion decision process.

Finally, the NCO Council could establish a "Sergeant Dixie Club," which provides peer recognition of outstanding NCO achievements and provides internal support for the SDF's NCO Corps.

## **Recruiting/Retention**

How do we recruit new members, both company grade officers and EMs for our SDF? This question has been raised many, many times over the years. The typical SDF volunteer is in their mid 40s, prior and non-prior service, both male and female. An increasing number of SDF units are looking for trained and established professionals (i.e., physicians, attorneys, engineers, and Clergy), which severely limits the availability of senior persons to actively search for the younger company grade officers and EMs; thus, a loss of individuals who might make excellent leaders in the future.

Retention comes by keeping a volunteer soldier involved and motivated. Formal and impromptu training at Drills, Musters, table-top exercises, and FTX events are a good way to develop the necessary skills and keep soldiers interested. Stressing compliance to military standards, height and weight, and



continuing education in real life skills provides that young SDF member with valuable skills that he can take back to the civilian world and use to enhance and possibly advance his career.

Many local areas require high school student to have so many hours of volunteer service, hours served with a SDF can count toward this goal, giving the student a feel for military life and instilling a sense of pride and discipline that can be carried a lifetime. This was done during the late 1990s and was quite successful until internal misadventures caused it to be halted (Community Service Cadet Corps, MDDF DIR 500-98, 1998; Hershkowitz, n.d.; ).<sup>2</sup>

## **Mentoring**

When a new recruit is brought into the SDF, whether that person is prior service, non-prior service, Officer, Warrant, NCO or EM, he would first be assigned to a Company Commander or Platoon Sergeant, as appropriate, to oversee his transition into the military organization. He would be taught basic training, how the organization functions, the do's, and do not's of the SDF and of his own unit. Drill and Ceremony, military customs and courtesies, history of the SDF, and specific MOS training would be the responsibility of the NCOs.

## **SUMMARY INTO THE FUTURE**

In today's world of international terrorism and state supported terrorism the National Guard faces regular call up for combat, peacekeeping, or homeland defense missions (10 U.S.C., n.d.). As a result the non-deployed NG units find themselves overloaded with pre- and post-deployment support activities, normal training, and maintenance duties as well as support of their state's homeland security needs.

Many of the State Military Department's have come to the realization that their SDF unit is indeed part of the state's military family, one of the pillars of the Military Department. Examples of the SDF activities in support of their NG are:

- o The Texas State Guard Medical Brigade (Greenstone, 2006; Benner, 2006).
- o The Maryland Defense Force's 10<sup>th</sup> Medical Regiment (Colgan, Davis and Barish, 2006; Hershkowitz and Nelson, 2007; Nelson et al., 2006; Nelson, 2007), Engineer Corps (Kelm, and Hershkowitz, 2007), Chaplaincy (Hershkowitz, 2007), Cavalry Troop (Roberts, 2007), and Command level (Smalken, 2006).
- o The South Carolina State Guard's Homeland Defense Brigade (Wishart, 2006) and Communication Battalion (Price, 2006).
- o Foreign nations in support of their military (Bankus, 2007).

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the MDDF Community Service Cadet Corps remains as an active program with Montgomery and Frederick County Boards of Education although prospective student candidates are annually told that the MDDF no longer cooperates with the state and county program.

Other SDF units have started supportive activities in support of their NG, such as the California State Military Reserve, the Georgia SDF and the New York Guard; however, there are no publications documenting their activities.

Across the country more State Defense Force units are beginning to transform from their Cold War mission structure into a professional military support role to their military department by providing a variety of services to the NG and through it to the State Emergency Management Agency in support of its mission. These SDF units are enlarging their force with quality soldiers to further meet the needs of their State. Smart growth, with quality leadership, comes from both the Officer and NCO Corps. It starts with a solid foundation; from the moment we recruit new SDF members with professional skills we need to begin their education to a military mind set, instilling our own brand of esprit de corps, and a SDF military ethos that will carry us and them into the future. As we support our State, our communities and our National Guardsmen's, let's not forget to support our own SDF soldiers, and provide them with the best professional military leadership.

The establishment of the NCO Council within each SDF unit will provide them with a solid basis for professional military growth and implementation of the military support mission portfolio.

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